

Elite Opponents

Gnolls

By Andy Collins



This column aims to provide DMs with interesting opponents to pit against the PCs in their campaigns. Building off of a simple base -- typically a standard monster from the *Monster Manual* -- each column uses the building blocks provided in the rulebooks to craft a variety of foes. Through the addition of class levels or templates, or even via simple HD advancement, the creatures presented in this column are transformed from run-of-the-mill opponents into memorable foes. Check out this column every month for formidable enemies built from a different monster!

The Gnoll: A Highly Versatile Foe

This month, our base creature is the humble gnoll. A step up from the typical orc or hobgoblin, the gnoll is a formidable foe for low-level characters, and groups of them can challenge even characters of up to 4th or 5th level. Because of their ferocity and toughness, evil warlords often use standard, 2-HD gnolls as "shock troops."



The gnoll also makes a great starting point for many variations. It's such an easily recognized foe in its standard form that players may overlook the potential challenges it can present. The addition of just a few class levels can create a gnoll capable of giving pause to even seasoned adventurers.

Our first example does exactly that by adding three levels of ranger, the gnoll's favored class.

Tarresh, the Gnoll Ranger

Tarresh is an elite hunter. His favored enemy is humankind, though you can easily adjust his choice to fit your campaign. (For instance, if gnolls are the traditional enemies of your prairie-dwelling halflings, simply change his favored enemy accordingly.)

Against low-level characters, Tarresh can make an excellent "heavy," serving as either the bodyguard or the elite assassin of the characters' main enemy. He could also serve as the PCs' primary foe, though his low Intelligence and Charisma limit his effectiveness as a leader of others.

Tarresh favors hit-and-run techniques. He prefers to snipe at his quarry from a safe distance, though he's quite capable of going toe-to-toe with opponents as well. He is also an implacable pursuer who can follow his prey for days if necessary.

Tarresh: Male gnoll Ranger 3; CR 4; Medium humanoid; HD 2d8+4 plus 3d8+6; hp 32; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15; Atk +8 melee (1d12+4/x3, masterwork greataxe) or +8 ranged (1d8+4/x3, +1 *composite longbow* [+3 Str bonus]) or +6/+6 ranged (1d8+4/x3, +1 *composite longbow* [+3 Str bonus] with Rapid Shot); SQ combat style (archery), darkvision 60 ft., favored enemy (humans +2), wild empathy +3; AL CE; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +3; Str 17, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 6.

Skills and Feats: Hide +4, Listen +8, Move Silently +5, Spot +9, Survival +8; Alertness, Endurance, [Rapid Shot], Track, Weapon Focus (longbow).

Combat Style: Tarresh has selected archery as his combat style. He gains the benefits of the Rapid Shot feat while he wears light or no armor.

Favored Enemy: Tarresh has selected humans as a favored enemy. He gains a +2 bonus on his Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks when using these skills against this type of creature. He gets the same bonus on weapon damage rolls against humans.

Wild Empathy (Ex): Tarresh can make a wild empathy check (1d20 + 3) to improve the attitude of an animal in the same manner that a Diplomacy check can change the attitude of a person. He and the animal must be able to study each other in order for him to use this ability.

Possessions: +1 *studded leather armor*, masterwork greataxe, +1 *composite longbow* (+3 Str bonus), 20 arrows.

Fehlzahn, the Fiendish Gnoll Ranger

As characters become more experienced, they learn the capabilities of their foes. After they've encountered a few humanoids with class levels, they stop being surprised when their enemies prove capable of the same tricks that they use. They also learn the best ways to take out such foes. With humanoid opponents, those ways usually involve magic -- be it a timely enchantment, or even just a *fireball*.

That's where Fehlzahn comes in handy. No ordinary gnoll, Fehlzahn is of fiendish heritage -- in fact, he claims to be able to trace his ancestry back to Yeenoghu himself. But whatever his origin, he makes a great foe for low- to mid-level characters. His damage reduction, resistances, and spell resistance are certain to give unsuspecting PCs fits, though a knowledgeable character might be able to guess that Fehlzahn has demonic blood by his coal-black eyes and scarlet-highlighted fur.

Fehlzahn occasionally offers his services to tribes of gnolls as a troubleshooter, helping them deal with particularly nettlesome foes. If your PCs have been giving the local humanoids some headaches, they might just call in Fehlzahn.

Fehlzahn: Male fiendish gnoll Ranger 5; CR 7; Medium humanoid (augmented humanoid, extraplanar); HD 2d8+4 plus 5d8+10; hp 45; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +6; Grp +9; Atk +10 melee (1d12+4/x3, masterwork greataxe) or +11 ranged (1d8+4/x3, +1 *composite longbow* [+3 Str bonus]); Full Atk +10/+5 melee (1d12+4/x3, masterwork greataxe) or +11/+6 ranged (1d8+4/x3, +1 *composite longbow* [+3 Str bonus]) or +9/+9/+4 ranged (1d8+4/x3, +1 *composite longbow* [+3 Str bonus] with Rapid Shot); SA smite good 1/day; SQ combat style (archery), damage reduction 5/magic, darkvision 60 ft., favored enemies (humans +4, elves +2), resistances (cold 5, fire 5), spell resistance 12, wild empathy +5; AL CE; SV Fort +9, Ref +4, Will +5; Str 17, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 6.

Skills and Feats: Hide +8, Listen +8, Move Silently +7, Spot +13, Survival +10; Alertness, Endurance, Iron Will, [Rapid Shot], Track, Weapon Focus (longbow).

Smite Good (Su): Once per day, Fehlzahn can make a normal melee attack to deal 7 points of extra damage against a good foe.

Combat Style: Fehlzahn has selected archery as his combat style. He gains the benefits of the Rapid Shot feat while he wears light or no armor.

Favored Enemies: Fehlzahn has selected humans and elves as his favored enemies. He gains a bonus equal to +4 against humans and +2 against elves on his Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks when using these skills against these types of creatures. He gets the same bonus on weapon damage rolls against creatures of these types.

Wild Empathy (Ex): Fehlzahn can make a wild empathy check (1d20 + 5) to improve the attitude of an animal in the same manner that a Diplomacy check can change the attitude of a person. He and the animal must be able to study each other in order for him to use this ability.

Ranger Spells Prepared (1; save DC 12 + spell level): 1st -- *longstrider*.

Possessions: +1 *mithral chain shirt*, masterwork greataxe, +1 *composite longbow* (+3 Str bonus), 20 arrows, spell component pouch.

Y'reess, the Fiendish Gnoll Vampire Ranger

Our last featured gnoll is Y'reess. Like Fehlzahn, he has demonic blood, but unlike the self-proclaimed descendant of Yeenoghu, his blood doesn't actually flow through his veins anymore, Y'reess has existed for several decades as a vampire.

Once a member of an elite caste of demon-touched gnolls, Y'reess was an esteemed hunt leader among his people. Many years ago, he ran afoul of a powerful vampire when his pack of hunters discovered the creature's tomb. As a new vampire, Y'reess quickly became a favored servant of the creature who had initiated him into undeath, fetching whatever (or whoever) his master required. Then one day, while Y'reess was away, a group of adventurers destroyed the master vampire and his entire nest.

Now a free-willed vampire, Y'reess enjoys taunting his victims with his hyenalike laugh, and he sometimes

stalks his prey for many days before delivering the kill. He has no compunctions against preying on his own kind -- any allegiances he had to his fellow gnolls died when he did.

Y'reess can be a terrifying opponent for mid- to high-level adventurers, thanks to his awesome defenses and his quite competent offensive capability. He prefers to fight at range against tough opponents, choosing melee only against foes that appear to be solitary or injured.

Y'reess: Male fiendish gnoll vampire Ranger 9; CR 14; Medium undead (augmented humanoid, extraplanar); HD 2d12 plus 9d12; hp 71; Init +9; Spd 30 ft.; AC 29, touch 16, flat-footed 24; Base Atk +10; Grp +17; Atk +17 melee (1d6+10, slam) or +20 ranged (1d8+11/x3, +1 *unholy composite longbow* [+7 Str bonus] with +3 arrows); Full Atk +17 melee (1d6+10, slam) or +20/+15 ranged (1d8+11/x3, +1 *unholy composite longbow* [+7 Str bonus] with +3 arrows) or +18/+18/+13 ranged (1d8+11/x3, +1 *unholy composite longbow* [+7 Str bonus] with +3 arrows and Rapid Shot); SA blood drain, children of the night, create spawn, dominate, energy drain, smite good; SQ alternate form, animal companion, combat style (archery), damage reduction 10/silver and magic, darkvision 60 ft., evasion, fast healing 5, favored enemies (humans +4, elves +2), gaseous form, improved combat style (archery), resistances (cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10), spell resistance 16, spider climb, swift tracker, turn resistance +4, undead traits, wild empathy +9, woodland stride; AL CE; SV Fort +9, Ref +10, Will +8; Str 24, Dex 20, Con --, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +8, Hide +24, Listen +22, Move Silently +24, Search +8, Sense Motive +11, Spot +22, Survival +17; Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Endurance, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, [Manyshot], Mobility, [Rapid Shot], Track, Weapon Focus (longbow).

Blood Drain (Ex): Y'reess can suck blood from a living victim with his fangs by making a successful grapple check. If he pins the foe, he drains blood, dealing 1d4 points of Constitution drain each round the pin is maintained. On each such successful attack, Y'reess gains 5 temporary hit points.

Children of the Night (Su): Y'reess commands the lesser creatures of the world. Once per day, he can call forth 1d6+1 rat swarms, 1d4+1 bat swarms, or a pack of 3d6 hyenas as a standard action. These creatures arrive in 2d6 rounds and serve Y'reess for up to 1 hour.

Create Spawn (Su): A humanoid or monstrous humanoid slain by Y'reess's energy drain attack rises as a vampire spawn (see the Vampire Spawn entry in the *Monster Manual*, page 253) 1d4 days after burial. If Y'reess instead drains the victim's Constitution to 0 or lower, the victim returns as a spawn if it had 4 or fewer HD and as a vampire if it had 5 or more HD. In either case, the new vampire or spawn is under the command of Y'reess and remains enslaved until his destruction. At any given time, Y'reess may have enslaved spawn totaling no more than 22 Hit Dice. Any spawn he creates that would exceed this limit are created as free-willed vampires or vampire spawn. Y'reess may voluntarily free an enslaved spawn in order to enslave a new one, but once freed, a vampire or vampire spawn cannot be enslaved again.

Dominate (Su): Y'reess can crush an opponent's will just by looking into his or her eyes. This effect is similar to a gaze attack, except that Y'reess must use a standard action, and those merely looking at him are not affected. Anyone Y'reess targets must succeed on a Will save (DC 15) or fall instantly under his influence as though via a *dominate person* spell (caster level 12th). The ability has a range of 30 feet.

Energy Drain (Su): Any living creature hit by Y'reess's slam attack gains two negative levels. For each negative level bestowed, Y'reess gains 5 temporary hit points. Y'reess can use his energy drain ability once per round.

Smite Good (Su): Once per day, Y'reess can make a normal melee attack to deal 11 points of extra damage against a good foe.

Alternate Form (Su): Y'reess can assume the shape of a bat, dire bat, hyena, or dire hyena (equivalent to dire wolf) as a standard action. This ability is similar to a *polymorph* spell (caster level 12th), except that Y'reess does not regain hit points for changing form and must choose from among the forms mentioned here. While in his alternate form, he loses his natural slam attack and dominate ability, but he gains the natural weapons and extraordinary special attacks of his new form. He can remain in that form until he assumes another or until the next sunrise.

Animal Companion: Y'reess may have one or more animal companions, but he has none at this time.

Combat Style: Y'reess has selected archery as his combat style. He gains the benefits of the Rapid Shot feat while he wears light or no armor.

Evasion (Ex): If exposed to any effect that normally allows a character to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, Y'reess takes no damage with a successful saving throw.

Fast Healing (Ex): Y'reess heals 5 points of damage each round so long as he has at least 1 hit point. If reduced to 0 hit points in combat, he automatically assumes gaseous form and attempts to escape. He must reach his coffin home within 2 hours or be utterly destroyed. (He can travel up to 9 miles in 2 hours.) Any additional damage dealt to him after he has been forced into gaseous form has no effect. Once at rest in his coffin, Y'reess is helpless. He regains 1 hit point after 1 hour, then is no longer helpless and resumes healing at the rate of 5 hit points per round.

Favored Enemies: Y'reess has selected humans and elves as his favored enemies. He gains a +4 bonus against humans and a +2 bonus against elves on his Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks when using these skills against these types of creatures. He gets the same bonus on weapon damage rolls against creatures of these types.

Gaseous Form (Su): As a standard action, Y'reess can assume gaseous form at will as the spell (caster level 5th), but he can remain gaseous indefinitely and has a fly speed of 20 feet with perfect maneuverability.

Improved Combat Style: Y'reess has selected archery as his combat style. He gains the benefits of the Manyshot feat while he wears light or no armor.

Spider Climb (Ex): Y'reess can climb sheer surfaces as though with a *spider climb* spell.

Swift Tracker (Ex): Y'reess can move at his normal speed while following tracks without taking the normal -5 penalty. He takes only a -10 penalty (instead of the usual -20) when moving at up to twice normal speed while tracking.

Turn Resistance (Ex): Y'reess is treated as a 15-HD undead for the purpose of turn, rebuke, command, or bolster attempts.

Undead Traits: Y'reess is immune to mind-affecting effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects or is harmless. He is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage to his physical ability scores, ability drain, energy drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or death from massive damage. He cannot be raised, and resurrection works only if he is willing.

Wild Empathy (Ex): Y'reess can make a wild empathy check (1d20 + 9) to improve the attitude of an animal in the same manner that a Diplomacy check can change the attitude of a person. He and the animal must be able to study each other in order for him to use this ability.

Woodland Stride: Y'reess may move through natural thorns, briars, overgrown areas, and similar terrain at his normal speed without suffering damage or other impairment. However, thorns, briars, and overgrown areas that are enchanted or magically manipulated to impede motion still affect him.

Ranger Spells Prepared (2/1; save DC 13 + spell level): 1st -- *alarm*, *resist energy*; 2nd -- *barkskin*.

Possessions: +2 mithral chain shirt, +1 ring of protection, cloak of displacement (minor), +1 unholy composite longbow (+7 Str bonus), 20 +3 arrows, spell component pouch.

About the Author

By day, Andy Collins works a senior designer in the Roleplaying R&D department at Wizards of the Coast, Inc. His credits include the *Player's Handbook* v.3.5, the *Epic Level Handbook*, and the upcoming *Draconomicon*. By night, however, he fights crime as a masked vigilante. Or maybe not.

Based on the original **Dungeons & Dragons®** game by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and on the new edition of the **Dungeons & Dragons** game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison. **D&D**, **Dungeons & Dragons**, and **Forgotten Realms** are registered trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All Wizards characters, character names, and the distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This material is protected under the laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction of or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, places, or events is purely coincidental. This Wizards of the Coast game product contains no Open Game Content. No portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without written permission. To learn more about the Open Gaming License and the d20 System License, please visit **www.wizards.com/d20**. ©2001-2004 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All rights reserved. Made in the U.S.A.

Visit our website at www.wizards.com/dnd